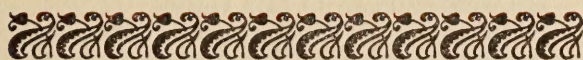

The Slogan
A Million Tithers
in Methodism



The Basis
of
Stewardship
By
George F. Pentecost, D.D.

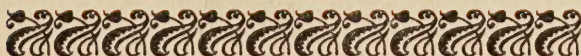
*"I am quite ready to consider that this is a higher law than that of the tithe * * *.*

"As a Christian I would be ashamed to pitch my beneficences on a lower scale than that of the Jew."

PART ONE

"GOD makes His demands upon His people on the ground of His ownership and His right to the legitimate and fixed portion of the proceeds of His estate."

The Master would not appeal to His steward for money, merely on the ground of need on His part and the sense



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of gratitude on the part of the steward. He demands it as His right.

I do not say that our God does not make His appeal to us on the ground of grace; that He does not seek to awaken in us a deep sense of gratitude and a high sense of gracious relationship.

From those of us who recognize these higher relationships there is no need to *demand* a response to God's claim; but it is at the same time good for us all to understand and recognize the ground upon which God's claims upon us are founded.

This supreme ground is God's ownership; as may be seen from the following facts:



ALL Time belongs to God. When God finished His creation He set apart and sanctified the seventh day.

This did not mean that He resigned all claim upon the other six days of the week; but that *the special setting apart of the Sabbath was a recognition of the fact that all time was His.*

I need not go into detail as to this. It is sufficient to remind you of the fact that God has in an especial manner set up His claim upon our time, and that the Sabbath day is His seal upon time and His sovereignty over both His people and their time and service.

Let us not forget, therefore, that all time belongs to God and that we are His servants on every day of the week and may not take any portion of time out of His hands and say to ourselves, "This is my day and I may do with it as I please."

It is a great lesson for Christians to learn that time belongs to God.

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III

ALL Souls belong to God. The redemption of the first-born was God's seal upon all the children of Israel, and upon all the cattle of the field, and upon all the sheep of the flock.

He has plainly declared that "all souls are mine; as the soul of the father so also the soul of the son is mine." (Ezekial 18:4.)

I need scarcely remind you that under grace God's ownership in the souls of men is emphasized by His redemption. "Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirits *which are God's*." (I Corinthians 6:20).

It is clear that we have no more right to act for ourselves without reference to God and His will and wish than had our Lord when He said that He came not to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him.

No man, certainly no Christian man, may say: "I may do as I please. I am my own master." "For One is your master, even Christ."

III

GOD'S Ownership extends to the Land. We have much to learn in this respect.

"The land shall not be sold forever, *for the land is mine*; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me." (Leviticus 25:23.)

When God put the people in possession of the land of Canaan, *He did not give them a quit claim deed to it*. He only loaned it to them. They could pass no title to it to another except under the restriction of the Jubilee year when all land went back under the Divine lease to the original tenant.

Nor is the land in any part of the world otherwise than God's. He created it. He has prepared it and stored up within it all its fruitful capacity. He it is who sends His sunshine and His rain upon it and makes it to bring forth and bud. He covers

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it with His snow and sifts down upon it from the air the nitrates without which all our cultivation would bring forth no crops. He lends it to us or leases it to us or rents it to us; *but He has never passed title to the land to any man or to any king or corporation.*

We are at best but His tenants. If we do not recognize His ownership we are but "squatters," to be plucked up out of His land at His will, as He plucked up Israel out of "My land which I have given them." (II Chronicles 7:20.)

III

THE Silver and the Gold are His. "The silver is mine and the gold is mine saith the Lord of hosts." (Haggai 2:8.)

If He allows us to go into His storehouse and dig therefrom His silver and His gold, it is only of His goodness and not because He has renounced His ownership.

That same silver and gold, when in circulation, is still the Lord's, and *we use it and spend it either as His stewards or as those who have embezzled it.*

God is continually giving us notice and warning that the silver and the gold are His; and that at our peril we use it selfishly or without regard to His claims upon it.

Some are losing their silver and their gold in business and in bad speculation, and some are worse than losing it, while holding on to or mispending it; some are losing their wives and their children by death; and many a one, like the rich fool who felicitated himself upon his new and larger barns which he had filled with his wealth and congratulated himself on length of days and much pleasure, is hearing God's voice calling to him: "Thou fool, this night thy life shall be required of thee; then whose shall these things be which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:18.)

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ALL Living Creatures belong to God. "For every beast of the forest is mine and the cattle on a thousand hills. All the fowls of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field *are mine . . . The world is mine, and the fulness thereof.*" (Psalms 50:10, 23.)

God has placed all these living creatures upon the hills and in the forests for our use, but they are still His, and we are only His stewards in the use of them, as of other things of His wealth.



THE Tithe of all the products of the field and the flock is God's.

It is not my purpose to discuss at length the question of the tithe. Here is the law of the tithe. It will do you good to read it and make a careful study of it.

*"And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's; it is holy unto the Lord.
* * * And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord."* (Leviticus, 27:33-33).

THERE is no ingenuity of interpretation by which this holy law of the tithe can be set aside.

There was no institution in Israel more solemnly enjoined than was this matter of the tithe. Before the priest, when he brought up his tithe, the worshiper solemnly declared that he had been faithful in the matter of his tithing, that he had not used any part of the tithe for his own benefit, or for any other purpose than that for which the tithe was dedicated; and that, in fact,

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he had literally obeyed the law of the tithe. (Deuteronomy 26.)

Nevertheless every kind of argument is resorted to, to avoid the fulfilling of this law. For instance, some say that it was a purely Old Testament and legal matter, and has no place in the Gospel dispensation.

Let it be remembered that the tithe was given by Abraham to Melchiledek long before the Law was given and that in the Epistle to the Hebrews we are told that the tithe of Abraham was paid to Christ. In other words we are instructed that the whole Levitical system was a tribute paid to Christ or a shadow of the gospel system.

If some maintain that, because the tithe was a duty under the Levitical system which is abolished in Christ even so we might say of the Sabbath and of the ten commandments.

Christ did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it. *If we are not under the law as to detailed observances, we are still under the law interpreted by the Gospel.*

There is a difference in the method of paying tithes, but not in the spirit of the law. The obligation of the Christian to fulfill every principle involved in the law is greater than the obligation resting upon the Jew.

Just as the sacrifice of Christ was better than those offered under the law, so is the obedience of Christians a higher one than that exacted of the Jew. *The law of gratitude is greater than the law of Moses.*

When David cried out: "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits unto me," he was thinking of a higher law than that which regulated the paying of tithes.

The Christian who does not give of his substance "as the Lord has prospered him" (I Corinthians 16:2), has fallen immeasurably behind the Jew in his relation to God.

I am persuaded that all these ingenious arguments are made to enable the makers of them to escape the discharge of their stewardship. They are

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like the unjust steward who said to his Lord's debtors: "Take thy bill quickly and write down fifty."

Let it again be remembered that God has never parted with His ownership nor released the tenants of His land or the stewards of His estates and talents from rendering to Him the due portion of the proceeds which come into their hands.

PART TWO

The Rule of Ownership

IN order that we may yet more clearly understand this matter I shall endeavor succinctly to set forth the conditions under which we are to be faithful as stewards, in rendering unto God that which is His due.



THE Statutory Command: That is the law of the tithe which we have just discussed.

According to that statute, every Israelite was required, under the most solemn obligations, to return to the Lord a full tenth of all the increase of flock or herd or land or tree.

In other words, God leased or lent to His people the land, which is His, and made condition that they should pay Him a certain fixed rent, or one tenth of their income. This was a law, not an optional arrangement. Certainly a generous arrangement, but still a law.

"I give you the land, I will water it with early and latter rains, I will send my sunshine upon it and let my enriching and warming snow fall upon it. You will cultivate it, and at harvest time you will turn over to Me a tenth of the fruit of the flocks and herds of the land and of the trees."

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It was as much a law as it is for you or me to pay a monthly or yearly rent for the house in which we live. The payment of our rent money is not a voluntary gift to our landlord. Neither was the payment of the tithe a voluntary gift to the Lord.

He was simply paying to the Lord that which was His.



THE rule of Voluntary Giving: God required the payment of the tithe as a legal obligation, but there was another rule, namely that of Free Will Offerings.

When the children of Israel came up out of Egypt, God commanded that a tabernacle be built in which He might be worshipped, and from which He might communicate unto His people.

For this purpose He *asked* the people to *give a free will offering*. He did not prescribe how much they should give or in what proportion in relation to their possessions they should give. This offering was to be entirely a matter of free will.

“Speak unto the children of Israel that they bring me an offering; of every man that *giveth it willingly with the heart* ye shall take my offering.”

“This is the thing which the Lord commands, saying: Take ye from among you an offering for the Lord; *whosoever is of a willing heart*, let him bring it, an offering of the Lord, gold and silver and brass.” . . . “And they came every one *whose heart stirred him up* and every one whose spirit made him willing and they brought the Lord’s offering;” “and the children of Israel brought *a willing offering* to the Lord, *every man and woman whose heart made them willing* to bring for all manner of work which the Lord commanded to be made by the hand of Moses.” (Exodus 25:2; 35:21; 26:29.)

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HERE, indeed, is a higher law of stewardship. God demands His tithe, but He asks His willing-hearted people, of their own free will, to bring offerings to Him for His service.

This indeed is the law under which all God's people should act. The free-will offering had another purpose, namely, to equalize gifts. The rich and the poor alike must pay their tithe; but in the case of the poor man, the tithe rested more heavily than upon the rich man. A rich man can give a tithe of \$100 out of an income of \$1,000 and have \$900 left, while a poor man, paying a tithe of \$10 out of an income of \$100, has only \$90 left on which to live.

Therefore, the free-will offering enables the rich man to give *in proportion* "as the Lord has prospered him." It is a noteworthy fact, that in every outpouring of wealth at the feet of the Lord the free-will offerings were greatly in excess of the tithes.

In the course of time, when Israel became sadly backslidden, the tithes and free-will offerings fell off to such an extent that the Lord charged them with robbery. To their scornful inquiry, "Wherein have we robbed thee?" the answer was, "In tithes and offerings" (Malachi 3:10.).

To withhold the tithe and the offering is counted by God to be robbery.

This is a serious charge, and a more serious fact in the lives of those who are guilty of this unfaithfulness.

III

THE Rule of Proportionate Giving: Bearing in mind the fundamental and underlying law of the tithe, the Lord would lift our whole beneficence or stewardship to the highest plane of grateful voluntarism.

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That is, he would have us give to him as a matter of grateful love, leaving the statutory law of the tithe to be swallowed up in a method of grateful, systematic, and proportionate giving.

*Here, then, is the New Testament law:** “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God has prospered him.” (I Corinthians 16:2.) I am quite ready to concede that this is a higher law than that of the tithe.

If we Christians should conscientiously and cheerfully follow it out there would be no lack of money in the Lord’s treasury. And how splendidly the poor exiled Jews gave when they returned from Babylon, laden with gifts with which to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple (Ezra, Chapters 1, 2, 3.)

I wonder whether the time will ever come when God’s people, under the Gospel dispensation, will be as generous in their free-will offerings as the old Israelites, the Jews, were under the law.

As a Christian I would be ashamed to pitch my beneficence on a lower scale than did the Jew.

A Question of Percentage

One day when we were talking about the tithe, a friend said to me:—

“When I was a poor boy earning only a few dollars a week, I gave a tithe to the Lord; when I got a fairly good salary I still gave my tenth to the Lord; after I became comfortably well off, I continued to give my tenth; even after I became a comparatively wealthy man, I still gave my tenth; but of late years *my business has so grown and increased that I can no longer afford to give a*

* Note: A question may arise as to the use of this scripture in this connection as it is apparent from the context that Paul had in mind the offerings for the poor saints, but, on the other hand, is it unreasonable to suppose that the apostle was merely taking advantage of, and enlarging upon, the established method of tithe paying, trying to lift “our whole beneficence or stewardship to the highest plane of grateful voluntarism”?—R. S. C.

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tenth of my profits, for I need more in my business.”

Here is a once faithful steward sadly fallen from grace and become a “robber of God.”

Another very rich man said: “I gave my tenth systematically and conscientiously until my wealth increased to such an extent that, considering the New Testament rule of giving ‘as prospered,’ I gave two tenths, or one fifth of my income. Still I grew richer, until I gave a fourth of my income. Finally I felt that I must do more and now I give a full half of my income to God, and still I have enough and to spare.”

Contrast the giving of these two rich men. Which, think you, is the truer Christian? I said to my friend, who said he could not spare a tenth out of his business: “My dear friend, when did that great business which you are conducting become *your* business; when did it cease to be *God’s* business; when did you cease to be *God’s* steward conducting and *administering* the business for him?”

Surely it is required in a steward that he be faithful.

So long as we do not forget that we are stewards and not owners, we probably will be faithful; but when we forget that we are stewards and assume to be owners, then we most likely shall become embezzlers of our Lord’s goods.

“THE Way beyond the Alphabet is Through the Alphabet, and the Way beyond the Tenth is Through the Tenth.”

BISHOP EDWIN H. HUGHES

What is the Centenary Movement?

It is commemorative of the one hundredth anniversary of Methodist Missions. It is God's trumpet call to Methodism to face the world's greatest crisis. It is a call to repent. The Church has been praying "Thy Kingdom come on earth" but has not ministered to hungry millions in foreign fields and nearer home.

So world-wide emergencies crowd upon us demanding vast expenditure of wealth and large enlistment of the youth of Methodism. Adding to the seriousness of the situation comes the general warning to the Church for "preparedness" for the great "after-war." The Church of Christ is soon to be tested as never before.

The need of the hour is a revived and mightily spiritualized Church. The Centenary Movement, in God's providence, was raised up by the General Conference not primarily to supply millions of money, but to lift Methodism to a new plane of spiritual vision and ministry from which it shall accomplish its part of the Christian Conquest of the World.

The Slogan A Million Tithers in Methodism

The Department for the Promotion of Christian Stewardship and Tithing is one of the providential agencies of the Centenary Movement for this new uplift of the Church.

Joint Centenary Committee

Methodist Episcopal Church
Methodist Episcopal Church, South
111 Fifth Avenue, New York

For Information and Literature address Joint Centenary Committee, Methodist Episcopal Church, 111 Fifth Avenue, New York.
